

The Delaware: *A National Treasure*

The Delaware, the longest un-dammed river east of the Mississippi, is as steeped in history as it is diverse in nature. It serves as a major source of water for big cities and heavy industry, yet supports a world-class trout fishery. Seventeen million people rely on the Delaware River Basin for water, but the river itself



is small, draining only four-tenths of one percent of the total continental U.S. land area. Three-quarters of the non-tidal river – about 150 miles – has

been included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, a testament to the remarkable improvement in its water quality.



War has visited the river and so have literary giants. Walt Whitman discovered poetry in its commerce, describing the steam tugs that plied it as “saucy little bullpups of the current.” Zane Grey wrote



about the river before heading west. William Penn signed a treaty with the Indians on its banks.



George Washington and his troops rowed across it, en route to a decisive victory over the British Crown. In 1915, to meet the war demand, the world’s largest shipyard was built on Hog Island, offshore of Philadelphia. Upstream the river flows beneath the Delaware Aqueduct, built by engineer John Roebling

who designed the fabled Brooklyn Bridge. The aqueduct served as a watery passage for mule-pulled canal boats. The river empties into the Delaware Bay, which washes by old whaling towns.

Charles Kuralt may have had the Delaware in mind when he wrote “I started out thinking of America as highways and state lines. As I got to know it better I began to think



of it as rivers. America is a great story, and there is a river on every page of it.” But it was U.S. Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes who perhaps best captured the river’s essence. In a 1931 decision involving the sharing of the Delaware’s waters he wrote, “A river is more than an amenity, it is a treasure.”

